

GOOD ROADS EVERYWHERE: A History of Road Building in Arizona



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Cover Photograph

U.S. Highway 66 at Gold Road, circa 1930s
Norman Wallace, Photographer
(Courtesy of Arizona Department of Transportation)

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FOREWORD

The fact that many Arizona roadways may be considered to be historic properties that warrant contemplation in planning is the primary reason why the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), with funding provided by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), pursued a project to gather the history of road building in Arizona. The concern by both ADOT and FHWA about how to reasonably take the historic associations and characteristics of roadways into consideration in planning roadway construction, maintenance, and improvement projects remains even after the completion of this manuscript.

Since the initiation of this project, there has been an evolution of thinking by ADOT and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding what constitutes a reasonable approach to considering the historic preservation of in-use and abandoned historic roadways. At the outset, the approach was to carefully gather information and consider the possible historic associations of roadways in order to propose appropriate areas of significance for roadways. Once the areas of significance were identified for roadways, the characteristics worthy of preservation would have been identified and it would be possible to evaluate the integrity of road segments for specific projects. After areas of significance for roadways were proposed in early drafts of this roads history, it was immediately clear that there would be no agreement on the significance of roads among the authors, SHPO, ADOT, and the staff of other agencies and other researchers who reviewed the draft document. Without a consensus on the significance of roadways there would be no agreement on whether an individual segment retained integrity or whether the scope of a project would adversely impact a historic roadway.

The lack of a consensus on the significance of roadways did not mean that the value of a history of Arizona road building was not generally recognized. This history of road building revealed that roads can be considered “structures” as well as “networks” or “systems.” With the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of the Interstate Highway System, the systemic character of state highways was recognized and with it a desire to divert focus away from evaluating individual segments and to considering possible cumulative impacts on a highway system. This change occurred in conjunction with the emphasis at the federal level to combine environmental streamlining with stewardship. Streamlining the consideration of historic roads in planning is now occurring with the development of a programmatic approach to roads as networks or systems. ADOT, FHWA, and SHPO are now working together to develop a programmatic approach that de-emphasizes the need for assessment of integrity for individual road segments.

This history of Arizona roads was written as our perceptions and considerations of roads changed. Despite shifts in the current thinking, approaches to evaluating specific road segments were retained in this volume in the event they may be integrated as a part of the programmatic approach to considering roadways.

Owen Lindauer
William S. Collins

PREFACE

This overview is the result of a project that was conducted under a contract with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) supported by Enhancement Funds from the Federal Highway Administration. The work began in 1996 under the direction of Richard M. Duarte, manager of the Environmental Planning Section; and Bettina H. Rosenberg, historic preservation coordinator; with Robert Gasser, historic preservation specialist managing the contract until he took another position within ADOT. Historic preservation specialist Owen Lindauer took the lead in working to complete the project, but he left ADOT for another job while revisions were still ongoing. By then Bettina had retired, and when Serelle Laine took over Bettina's job she worked to complete the study. Others who provided comments to ADOT on various drafts of this document include William Collins of the State Historic Preservation Office, consultants Lyle Stone and Pat Stein, and Michael Sullivan of the Tonto National Forest. The efforts of all the ADOT staff and other reviewers who helped shape and eventually complete this document are appreciated.

This overview is intended to relate the history of Arizona road building, particularly the state highway system, with the regulatory context of historic preservation. The original, optimistic goal was to write a historic context that would establish guidelines for consistently evaluating all historic vehicular roads throughout the state. That effort was to be completed in one year, and was to be followed by a Phase 2 inventory that would implement those procedures to identify, evaluate, and nominate many significant vehicular roads in Arizona to the National Register of Historic Places. As Phase 1 comes to a close some seven years later, that goal obviously was not achieved. There is some consolation in the recognition that it is not a simple task to develop a general consensus among the many parties interested in historic roads, and to date, no other state has had any significant degree of success.

Melissa Keane and J. Simon Bruder completed a draft of this document, with contributions by Kenneth M. Euge, in 1999. The draft document defined a series of historic contexts for evaluating the significance of roads in Arizona. The focus of the analysis was on the history of road building itself, rather than other historic themes to which roads may relate, such as roadside architecture, tourism, or development of agriculture and mining. The draft report concluded that many roads in the state have lost historic integrity because of the almost continual upgrading of the state's road network, and most others are undistinguished examples of a very common type—the two-lane bituminous highway. Agency reviewers concluded that the recommendations of the draft report, which emphasized preservation of only the “crown jewels” of Arizona's historic roads, were too narrow.

While ADOT staff contemplated what to do with the draft document, Ms. Keane and Ms. Bruder left URS, and completion of the document languished. ADOT arranged for an interagency meeting in 2001 to discuss historic roads. After the meeting, ADOT concluded that the draft report provided valuable historical perspective on road building in Arizona and the history of how the state highway system came to be built should be emphasized in a revised version of the report. ADOT acknowledged that future studies would have to take on the challenge of developing consensus among the various involved agencies about specific standards of practice for evaluating the National Register eligibility of Arizona's roads, and to work toward formal inventory and evaluation of historic-era roads managed by ADOT.

I then reorganized sections of the original draft and eliminated some sections that troubled reviewers. A revised draft was completed in June 2002 at a time when ADOT and the State Historic Preservation Office were forging a broader and more catholic strategy for addressing inventory, evaluation, and preservation of historic elements of the state highway network in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. That strategy is based on the blanket conclusion that the Arizona state highway system, writ large, is eligible for the National Register, but most routine maintenance and

minor upgrade project will not adversely affect the historic quality of the road system. Efforts to avoid or mitigate adverse effects will be highly focused on elements of the system deemed most significant. Although the details of that strategy are still being developed, the strategy simultaneously makes parts of this document obsolete and confirms the original conclusions about historic road preservation priorities.

Because Ms. Keane and Ms. Bruder completed the research and writing of the original draft report, with contributions by Kenneth Euge, it is appropriate to credit them as authors of this revised overview. Neither Melissa nor Simon will agree with every revision I made, and they should not be held responsible for my alterations of their original work.

A.E. (Gene) Rogge

ABSTRACT

The historic overview of road building was developed to provide background information for identifying roads in Arizona worthy of preservation. Chapter 1 describes the motivation of the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) for commissioning this overview, and discusses the historic preservation regulations that framed the approach. Chapter 2 briefly summarizes the political history and funding of road development in the United States, from the founding of the nation through the mid-twentieth century. Chapter 3 discusses the evolution of road-building technology. The history of road building in Arizona is discussed in Chapter 4, within a framework focusing on each of the four criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Chapter 5 presents case studies based on field reconnaissance of selected segments of five roads scattered across the state. Chapter 6 identifies some of the challenges of evaluating the National Register eligibility of Arizona's roads. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 7.

The general perspective of this study might be characterized as “bottom up” because it sought to develop guidelines for dealing with individual roads or even just road segments within the context of consultations required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Over the long time it took to complete the study, ADOT and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) turned to a more “top down” approach addressing the state highway system as a whole. The *Interim Procedures for the Treatment of Historic Roads* that ADOT, SHPO, and the Federal Highways Administration adopted in November 2002 to begin to implement this more programmatic strategy are briefly described in Chapter 7.

A series of maps of the state highway system in 1914, 1924, 1935, 1941, and 1946 are attached as Appendix A. Three maps of the state highway system dating from 1912, circa 1925, and 1939 are included as pocket maps. Appendix B is an annotated bibliography of 17 key references related to the history of roads, and Appendix C lists the more than 70 roads currently included in the National Register. Only one of these, a multiple property documentation form that provides a context for listing rural segments, urban segments, abandoned segments, and traveler-related facilities related to Route 66, includes any Arizona roads.

